



CA FALLESCIÓ EL LIBRO: ASCETIC READING
AND RESTORATIVE HERMENEUTICS IN *La vida
de Santo Domingo de Silos*

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The virgin martyrs who guide Gonzalo de Berceo's visionary Santa Oria in paradise have transcended their passion stories to become subjects of a narrative beyond time. They promise to complete Oria's reading, to overcome its limits and gaps, disclosing to her, in a text now truly consubstantial with its subject, knowledge beyond that transmissible or apprehensible in earth-bound tales:

Tú mucho te deleitas en las nuestras passiones,
de amor e de grado leyes nuestras razones;
queremos que entiendas entre las visiones
quál gloria reçibimos e quáles gualardones. (34)

Their deaths become a miraculous narrative opening that transforms hagiographic categories: their *passiones*, the often lurid accounts of their sufferings and deaths, become transcendent *vitae*, otherworldly biographies that unfold for the further delectation of the reader Oria. Judging herself unworthy of these magnificently immediate texts, she offers her own life as a story completed at the moment of its reception in their memory: "si me reçibiessedes vós en vuestra memoria, / allá serié conplida toda la mi estoria" (35cd). Where these texts and readings intersect with the experience of the reader/listener of Oria's tale sits Gonzalo himself, engaged in the "mester pesado"

of writing “en tiniebra” (*Oria* 10d); it is the labored, tenebrous tale *he* tells that attracts the attention of heavenly readers and wins that luminous instant of celestial completion. Berceo’s *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* offers a different experience. Here, a ragged, gaping text paradoxically imprisons the reader in ignorance, just as it leaves the captive of the final, unfinished miracle to languish in a dungeon, praying for deliverance:

El misme en la cárcel esso mismo facié,
la lengua non folgava, maguer preso yazié;
a Dios e al confessor rogava e dizié
que si lo dend librasen nunca malo serié.

De qual guisa issió dezir non lo sabría
ca fallesció el libro en que lo aprendía;
perdióse un quaderno, mas non por culpa mía,
escribir a ventura serié muy grant folía. (750–51)

Critical approaches to medieval Spanish letters have always been attentive to questions of reading. The *cuaderna vía* verse form in which Gonzalo composed proclaimed its affiliation to literate culture in opposition to the poetry of the minstrels, thus a great deal of twentieth-century research focused on the circumstances and purposes of the reading that *cuaderna vía* seemed to promote.¹ Recent criticism has produced more nuanced discussions of reading and interpretation in medieval texts, yet the many challenges that Gonzalo de Berceo’s narratives offer to contemporary readers have largely escaped critical notice, and discussions of reading in Berceo remain confined to the attempt to locate the poetic performance with respect to setting, audience, and event.² Berceo’s poems, in fact, abound with figures of readers and reading, but these, like his deference towards what has been consecrated in writing, his disparagement of the minstrels as vehicles of a base oral tradition, and his explicit concern for the process of poetic composition, have been

1. See Nepaulsingh, López Estrada, Rico, and Deyermond for diverse perspectives on the complex relations between the cultivated poetry of the *cuaderna vía* narrators and the minstrels’ song that this poetry seems to disparage.

2. Gerli (“Poet and Pilgrim”) and Grieve (“Spectacle”) offer nuanced readings of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* that take account of discursive and commemorative strategies affecting performance and reception.

construed as the accoutrements of the purposefully didactic *cuaderna vía* verse.³ His representations of himself as translator of authoritative Latin sources have been read in the same vein. These self-representations, however, often have him tethered to a manuscript that discloses its secrets only partially, inhibiting his reading, truncating his knowledge, and thwarting his performance as bearer of the lore he transfers from Latin to the beloved cadences of his vernacular.⁴ Against these renderings of an always insufficient experience, I will argue, Berceo erects a contrasting model that conjoins reader and text, collapses the limits of self and object, of knowing and known, and thrusts experience beyond both the confines of the bounded world and the arbitrary, artificial boundaries of the text.

Gonzalo's hagiographies translate to vernacular verse the Latin prose legends of Iberian saints—Lorenzo the martyr; the recluse Oria; the hermit Mi-llán; and Domingo de Silos, restorer and defender of a decimated monastery in the reconquered wilderness of Northern Spain—whose stories and cult had fallen vulnerable to displacement and loss as Visigothic liturgy and tradition yielded to the Roman rite.⁵ With the exception of Lorenzo's incomplete

3. Gybbon-Monypenny's inquiry into the audience of clerkly verse in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Spain is an example of the best of the scholarship that investigated circumstances of medieval reading, and provides a good overview of prior work. Brownlee, Dagenais, and Franco-mano analyze tropes of reading in the *Libro de Buen Amor*; Gerli's recent article ("The Greeks") establishes a link between that text and Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* and clarifies the hermeneutical principles underlying the polysemy of the Archpriest's text. Grieve's essay on the *Libro de Apolonio* considers questions of reading and hermeneutics in a thirteenth-century *cuaderna vía* text which foregrounds the theme of reading and interpretation in a series of episodes in which the narrative hinges on the characters' skill at decoding riddles and conundrums.

4. Diz is a canny reader of Berceo's proclamations of source fidelity and observes that, far from extending to the smallest details as earlier critics argued, the poet's invocations of source authority do not extend *beyond* the level of the picayune. The tic of signaling the omissions of the source, she argues, establishes the reliability of Berceo as reader/translator even as it undermines source authority.

5. Wright notes the role of the Rioja region in preserving Visigothic liturgical manuscripts through a project of recopying undertaken circa 1200, noting that Gonzalo de Berceo's compositions bespeak a reverence for Visigothic traditions (222–46). Sánchez Jiménez challenges the conventional opinion that the Fourth Lateran Council had few immediate repercussions in Castile, arguing instead that there is a significant negative reaction, discernible in Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. While Sánchez Jiménez doesn't specifically treat the imposition of the Roman rite in Spain, the increased surveillance of Hispanic ecclesiastical practice in the wake of Lateran IV sought to guarantee ritual uniformity. The *Milagros*, the critic argues, represent a "defensa de las peculiares características de la iglesia hispana del siglo XIII" (547). Lappin's meticulous line-commentary in his edition of the *Vida de Santa Oria* teases out the links between Berceo's poem and the liturgy and traditions of the Mozarabic Church; similarly, his study of the cult of Santo Domingo in medieval Spain relates the saint's life and acts to the interaction of indigenous Mozar-

passion tale, the lives of Gonzalo's saints all underscore the saints' engagement with a textual tradition that conveys the model of sanctity that each saint will read, internalize, and embody. The poet highlights his own contribution to the dialectic of the pious text and that of the reader who comes to it willing to be inscribed with the sanctioned word; he thus establishes an analogy that links the present reader with the ideal reader, whose achieved holiness underwrites the model of reading endorsed within the poem.

This essay will focus on the *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos*, the longest and most typical of the hagiographic poems.⁶ Here, the saint's practice of reading figures prominently in the exercise of heroic virtue and bodily discipline that defines his sainthood. This privileged paradigm of reading, in turn, imparts a model for the imitation of the reader or hearer of the tale, bound though s/he may be to texts that, like the remnants Berceo grapples with, are subject to temporality's depredations and disclose only partially the truths they contain. The lesson codified in the person of the saint works to supplement the gaps left by the demolished source and Gonzalo's truncated copy, so that while the book from which he works fails, the book he writes imparts knowledge beyond even what it is able to contain.

In order to tease out the imagery and associations linking reading, asceticism, memory, and redemption in Domingo's tale, it is necessary to look first at medieval reading culture. In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel points out that reading always entails a social contract that implies the internalization of societal values as well as signs (7). Contemporary theories of the subject see in this process the diminishment of being, which slides inexorably into meaning as the subject becomes lost to itself and incapable of immediacy in knowledge or experience, bound instead in webs of infinite signification. In medieval monastic life, however, access to the authorized word and the incorporation of its messages completed being. The monastery—the space set apart for reading in the pre-scholastic Middle Ages—was home to a particular practice of reading, derived from the confluence of patristic

abic religious tradition and an encroaching Benedictine model of monastic spirituality (*Cult* 31–73).

6. The *Martirio de San Lorenzo* is unfinished, the *Vida de Santa Oria* lacks the typical tripartite structure, and the *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla's* instantiation of hagiographic structure is disrupted by the long interpolation on the pledge of Fernán González. Structural irregularities mark the *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* as well. Most notably, the narrative of the saint's posthumous miracles ends with the abrupt failure of the Latin source manuscript; nonetheless, Domingo's life is the one that most nearly conforms to the horizon of expectations raised by the genre.

exegetical traditions and monastic rules, that made reading a requisite devotion for monks. Monastic *lectio divina* was deemed uniquely able to unmake a sinful self and to inscribe both body and soul with the matter of sacred texts. Emerging from this program of reading, which comprised prayer, meditation, and contemplation, was a transformed person whose life was now the imaginary reenactment and physical embodiment of Scripture. In the *Didascalicon*, which was the most influential late medieval treatise as well as the first modern analysis of reading,⁷ Hugh of St. Victor so exalts the transformative power of reading that he proclaims it the only human endeavor able to “restore within us the divine likeness” lost in the Fall (61).⁸ The incorporation of signs, the conversion of being into signification, was itself the recuperation of that plenitude forfeited in the ill-fated moment of misreading when Eve assented to the word uttered by the serpent in Eden.⁹

Medieval pedagogy and memory training sought, through the inscription of the memory with sometimes horrifying pictures, to inculcate spiritual values and govern social conduct. Such a practice was, according to Jody Enders, “violent, coercive, [and] spectacular” (26).¹⁰ In monastic *lectio divina*, moreover, reading aimed at an utter transformation of the self through an agency that was linked to the very mechanics, themselves violent, of writing in manuscript culture. The term *compunctio*, which names a crucial emotional investment in pious reading, transfers the medical term for sudden, acute pain to the realm of the soul, to evoke the keen suffering that accompanies recognition of sin and awakens an aspiration toward union with God. It is, Leclercq says, “a shock, a blow, a ‘sting,’ a sort of burn. God goads us as if with a spear; He ‘presses’ us with insistence (*cum-pungere*), as if to pierce us” (30).

Reading’s transcendent arc, then, was anchored in bodily sensation. It had its inception in the wounding shock of compunction and proceeded through

7. Jerome Taylor points out that the *Didascalicon*’s survival in nearly one hundred manuscripts throughout forty-five libraries across Europe offers “a crude index of its influence on its own and subsequent ages” (4), while Brian Stock identifies the work as “the earliest ‘modern’ treatise on reading” (“Selections” 202).

8. Stock notes that Hugh approximates the Pelagian notion that education is capable of improving the fallen condition of the individual, an idea rejected by Augustine, whose own theories on reading exerted enormous influence on the Victorine (*Augustine* 18).

9. See Jager for an exhaustive study of the centrality of the Fall in patristic and medieval language theory, especially in the domains of doctrine, hermeneutics, and eloquence.

10. See Enders, “Rhetoric, Coercion, and the Memory of Violence,” Copeland, “The Pardoner’s Body and the Disciplining of Rhetoric,” and Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 130–37.

a practice as much corporeal as intellectual, to culminate in a person transformed into a metaphor of the Incarnation: a being of scripture thoroughly inhabiting a body of flesh. Monastic reading sought to produce a scriptural interiority, an inscribed self proceeding from a memory saturated with pious reading and rumination.

Paradoxically, the monastic transformation of the self was often founded upon a feat of forgetting. The novice had to erase the disorderly texts inscribed in a memory that was worldly and unsuited to the cloister. Mary Carruthers has noted the medieval trope of the parchment page used to emblemize this counter-mnemonic work: the page must be cleared and yet remain fit to receive new inscriptions. However, not only was the original writing an act of violent wounding, the erasure of the inscribed parchment inflicts yet more damage and renders it unserviceable for further use. Bernard of Clairvaux addresses the need for forgetting in a sermon to men seeking entry into his order and concludes that the page of memory wounded by the wanton writing of worldly life can be erased only through an act of grace.¹¹ God's forgiveness alone clears the page and allows for the renewal of self and soul through a program of reading that writes scripture upon the heart and transforms the person so that he himself becomes, like a book, the vehicle of the sacred word.

The *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* represents the transformation of a man into a saint through an ascetic practice that informs all of Domingo's earthly acts and proceeds from his participation in a textually mediated paradigm of sanctity. Through a practice of reading that is also a practice of corporeal transformation, Domingo gleans a model of holy living that be-

11. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ad Clericos de conversione*, 15,28, cited in Carruthers, "Reading with Attitude," 31. For discussions of the necessity and the techniques of forgetting as an adjunct of conversion see Carruthers, "Reading" 13–33 and *Craft* 94–99. Benedictine reading and meditation was deeply implicated in the transformation of memory. Coleman points out that through the repeated daily occupation of praying over memorized texts, art substitutes nature and "becomes nature by habit, and the mental space of the members of a monastic community is transformed by a collective memory and a collectively perceived, artificially created duration" (132). Monastic obedience, then, required surrender of the private memory just as it did of the private will. Gerli's astute reading of the *Libro de Buen Amor* situates its governing hermeneutic in this same tradition. Paradoxically, though, the poem's slippery and decidedly secular polysemy mobilizes a process of *unforgetting*, or *anamnesis*, by acting as a spur to the reader's memory and allowing "the discovery of the truth which abides there," a truth that "discloses hidden mysteries beyond objective signs and connects them to the history of human salvation" ("The Greeks" 426).

comes his very nature.¹² Domingo's ascetic reading is the vehicle by which the saint's body becomes an inscribed text, a language of witness which must neither be falsified nor falsely borne.¹³ It is, in Berceo's narrative as in monastic culture, reading itself that disciplines the body and inscribes desire so that Domingo's bodily witness becomes, paradoxically, an ongoing, lived martyrdom.¹⁴

In a brief incipit, Berceo's own labor prefigures that undertaken by the saint. The first acts of reading and writing center on the poet himself as he sketches the conditions of the poem's composition and reception. Each of these moments is marked by a peculiar doubling: the language of the present poem is figured explicitly as other than an earlier copy while the author traverses a path between an inherited but inert Latin hagiography and the voiced vernacular text:

Quiero fer una prosa en romanz paladino
en qual suele el pueblo fablar con so vezino,

12. Stock's remarks on textual communities bear important ramifications for my reading of the reader Domingo. While Stock directs his analysis at the community- and institution-building agency of a shared practice of deviant reading in medieval heretical and reform movements, his observations regarding the power of shared reading to bind disparate individuals into an integrated collectivity have informed my understanding of the community-engendering power of Berceo's poem. Stock suggests that a written text was less essential to the engendering of a textual community than the presence of "an individual, who, having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action" (*Implications* 90). Throughout the narrative of his life and miracles, Domingo serves as just such a figure for the communities that come into being around him.

13. Smalley suggests that every medieval scriptural study adheres to a hermeneutical principle of askesis, arguing that the inheritance of a patristic tradition that held that the Word is incarnate in scripture as the soul is in the body led to the sense that *littera* and *corpus* were very nearly interchangeable concepts. There logically followed a practice of reading that accepted the letter but treated it ascetically, as that which must be overcome in order to devote oneself to the spirit, which inhered not in the intellectual exercise of reading but in the meditation of which reading was the mere platform (1–2).

14. In the fourth-century "Hymn in Honor of the Passion of the Most Blessed Martyr Eulalia," the Hispanic author Prudentius represents the torture of the twelve-year-old girl—one of Oriá's celestial guides in Berceo's poem—as the transformation of her "limbs of clay" into a sacral page upon which the name of Christ is written in martyred blood. The rending of her flesh produces a text to be read with delight: "See, Lord [. . .] thy name is being written on me. How I love to read these letters, for they record thy victories, O Christ, and the very scarlet of the blood that is drawn speaks the holy name" (*Peristephanon* III. 135–39). The textualization of the body in Hispanic devotional literature, then, aligns the scripturally inscribed body not only with contemplative experience but with the ultimate sacrifice of self to faith in martyrdom as well.

ca non só tan letrado por fer otro latino,
bien valdrá, como creo, un vaso de bon vino. (2a–d)

Analogously, the poem shuttles between an assembly of earthly listeners—those who would reward the singer with his portion of good wine—and a listening God who rewards labors undertaken in His praise or in the praise of His servants. The suffering, or *lacerio*, of poetic effort assimilates Berceo's work to Domingo's ascetic labor: "suya sea el precio, yo seré su obrero; / galardón del lacerio yo en El lo espero" (4bc). The introductory verses of Santo Domingo's *Life*, then, focus on reading and reception to turn the audience's attention to matters of language, text, and experience—both corporeal and spiritual—and to prepare for the lesson embodied in the person of the saint.

The poem traces in quick strokes the contours of Domingo's precocious piety: his obedience, humility, charity, and the unusual sagacity that separates him from his peers and marks the boy as chosen and guided by God.¹⁵ Berceo first encapsulates Domingo's father, Juhan's, virtue: "amador de derecho, de seso acabado, / non falsarié juicio por aver monedado" (7cd). The father's "seso acabado,"—his refusal to abuse language and judgment—make him a worthy progenitor of the saint whose engagements with language and text will serve as a redemptive model.¹⁶ Domingo inherits and expands Juhan's discursive rectitude. His relationship to language mirrors that of his father and is defined by constancy:

La cepa era buena, engendró buen sarmiento,
non fue canna liviana, la que torna el viento,

15. Weinstein and Bell report that until the thirteenth century, when the story of Francesco Bernardino's dramatic stripping off of his finery in the public square of Assisi captured the imagination of a spiritually hungry populace, male saints followed a smooth road to perfection. Domingo exemplifies the untroubled, lifelong exercise of virtue typical of male sanctity. Female saints were not so lucky, having to suffer "the torments of a childhood beset by fears of marriage or of an adolescence ridden with sexual guilt" (48). Thus, the anchorite Oria who seeks Domingo's guidance (316–33) is troubled by visions of a phallic serpent, even though she has already undertaken an ascetic life.

16. Daniel Devoto's analysis of the language of reason and unreason in Berceo sheds light on these verses. Devoto argues that sanity, reason, or 'seso' is, in Berceo, discourse itself (600). Berceo's representations of unreason or insanity are always associated with discursive practices and index a state of sinfulness, while reason and the linguistic practices affiliated with it disclose a virtue that is synonymous with religious orthodoxy.

ca de luego fue cuerdo, ninno de buen cimiento,
de oír vanidades no lo prendié taliento. (9)

Importantly, it is the child's engagement with discourse—his 'cordura' and his refusal to entertain vain speech—that ratifies the description of his steadfastness.

Linguistic and bodily integrity in the saint's early life predicts the spiritual integrity of the man. He avoids the jokes that delight other children; his downcast eyes reject the follies of the world, and he purses his lips against "crazy," "corrupted" speech (11–12). In a precocious display of mnemotechnics, Domingo's memory is a vault for the treasure of good speech, "raçón buena" (16ab). Domingo's speech is entirely inscribed in the domain of prayer: he repeats the Lord's Prayer "sobra muchas vegadas" (17a), runs through all the verses of the Creed, and follows with "otras oraciones que avié costumadas" (17c).

The themes that have characterized the saint's youth recur throughout his life and his continued *praesentia* in the realm of earthly suffering after death. Santo Domingo is, in all of the phases and actions of his life and death, constant, self-same, unchanging. That constancy, which, to a great extent, constitutes his sanctity itself, is figured through measured and orderly uses of language, vision, and memory that have been sown and cultivated through a husbandry of reading; and it stands against the discordant and chaotic discourses that give voice to the blindness and oblivion of the sinful world. Domingo's steadfastness, indeed, issues from his flawless incorporation of the holy texts that are the stuff of his reading and the models of his exemplary life.

Between the description of the pre-literate but linguistically perfect child and the narrative of Domingo's early schooling, Berceo lingers over the pastoral scene of the obedient saint tending his father's flock of sheep. The narrator traces the typological affiliations linking the Spanish shepherd to his precursors Abel, David, San Millán, and, ultimately, Christ. While the religious significance of the sequence is paramount, the typology also inserts Domingo into a textual tradition that encompasses those chosen by God, even as it inserts Berceo himself into that same tradition. By including San Millán in the scriptural company, Berceo, as the author of Millán's vernacular life, stakes a place for himself alongside the human vehicles of the articulation of salvation history. Moreover, he signals the crucial role of reading in the transmission of that tradition and of its lessons for the salvation of the Christian reader:

Los sanctos patriarchas todos fueron pastores,
que de la lei vieja fueron contenedores;
aún como leemos e somos sabidores,
pastor fue sant Millán e otros confesores.

De pastores leemos muchas buenas raçones,
que issieron prudentes, fueron sanctos varones;
esto bien lo trobamos en muchas de lectiones,
que trae est officio buenas terminaciones. (27–28)

While the unschooled, illiterate Domingo already pertains to a typological chain of precursors, his readers' access to that succession is only through the mediating texts that make it manifest across time. Those texts—the “buenas raçones” that “we read”—reprise the content of Domingo's precocious memory, the “raçón buena” that he inventories in childhood. Text and reading offer the poetic audience an inkling of what, for Domingo, is direct, experiential, and prior to textual mediation.

The child is already perfect in virtue, “pleno de buenas mannas” (34a), when he decides to learn to read. The study that Domingo undertakes emerges out of an inborn virtue and serves as a spur to a life perfected by the knowledge of great deeds internalized through literacy: “asmó de seer clérigo, saber buenas façannas, / pora bevir honesto[. . .]” (34cd). The inception of Domingo's study occasions a shift in poetic language: diminutives govern the quatrain that narrates the start of his lessons. The image of the ardent schoolboy grasping for the first time the instruments of the erudition he desires is vivid with tenderness and affective immediacy:

Plogo a los parientes quando lo entendieron,
cambiáronli el hábito, otro mejor li dieron;
buscáronli maestro, el mejor que podieron,
leváronlo a glesia, a Dios lo offrecieron.

Diéronli su cartiella a ley de monaciello,
assentóse en tierra, tollióse el capiello;
en la mano derecha priso su estaquiello,
apriso fasta'l títol en poco de ratiello. (35–36)

The sobriety that held Domingo apart and suggested his difference from his contemporaries was evoked through corporeal signs of closure that fig-

ured the boy as a champion of sensorial chastity. As such, he has been a masterful custodian of memory, emerging out of childhood with an immaculate page inscribed only with the “*raçón buena*” and the “*buenas mannas*” that he has archived with precocious solemnity. Thus his accession to a textual culture and to the paradigms of holy action he craves requires of him no feats of forgetting; the unsullied parchment of his memory needs no scraping. The violence of Domingo’s learning is that of separation as his family gives him over to both God and master in a single gesture of forfeiture. At the moment of this necessary cleavage, the figure who has heretofore stood militantly apart from his fellows in uncharacteristic juvenile *gravitas* is subject to a poignant diminution. The sober soldier becomes a little scholar, grasping his stylus as he enters into the studies that will ultimately bear him away from his earthly home.

The storehouse of the child’s memory, already primed by his warehousing of gleaned wisdom and the repeated prayers he has inscribed there, is then filled until it is replete with sacred texts. Interpretative values now intervene to transform the memory from an inert, passive receptacle to an active principle that transacts the exchange of letter for spirit in the hermeneutical discernment that is the hallmark of pious reading:

Fue en poco de tiempo el infant salteriado,
de imnos e de cánticos bien e gent decorado,
evangelios e pístolas aprísolas privado,
algún mayor levava el mosto mas baldado.

Bien leyé e cantava sin ninguna pereza,
mas tenié en el seso toda su agudeza,
ca sabié que en esso li yazié la proveza,
non querrié el meollo perder por la corteza. (38–39)

The first verse in the passage cited represents a saintly use of memory and figures the heart as its seat. The narrator underscores the boy’s prodigious memory as he surpasses older students in his warehousing of Biblical texts. Replicating the mechanics of Domingo’s transformation at the level of poetic language, passive verb structures govern the narration of the boy’s first foray into the acquisition of a scriptural memory. He is first a receptacle, “*salteriado*” and “*decorado*” with the texts that will write themselves upon the

page of his memory to give forth a new man who embodies the content of those hallowed words.

The connection of memory and reading in monastic culture was restorative and redemptive. Both were charged with religious significance and engaged with the most essential practices of a devout life. The meditative component of *lectio divina* represents a feat of commemorative reading wherein one 'learns' a sacred text "with one's whole being: with the body, since the mouth pronounced it, with the memory which fixes it, with the intelligence which understands its meaning, and with the will which desires to put it into practice" (Leclercq 17). Monastic *meditatio*—a total attention to all of the sensorial traces of the word as a way through the somatic to the spiritual significance that lies within and beyond the 'body' of the letter—is inalienable from the act of reading. *Lectio divina* thus becomes a writing that inscribes the text of scripture upon both the body and the soul.¹⁷ The fruitful engagement of reading and memory reconstitutes human interiority and desire so that the bottomless ache of worldly desire is itself transformed into yearning for union with God.

Berceo's representation of Domingo's initiation as a reader reflects all of these aspects of meditative, contemplative reading. The narrative channels the materials of the memory into "el seso," the engine of understanding. Again Berceo reprises this thematic process at the material level of poetic language; active verbal structures dominate as Domingo embodies the textual content of sanctity and exercises the interpretive discrimination that signals his perfection as a reader. His reading now conforms to the same corporeal practice that marks his lived devotion: he has achieved the ideal of an ascetic hermeneusis. Disdaining the inert husk of the letter as he has disdained the world and the flesh, Domingo now pursues the kernel, the spiritual center that resonates with his own spiritual practice to transform his life.

The conclusion of Domingo's formation as a reader portrays the harvest of his season of learning as action that issues from incarnated wisdom:

17. This is in distinction to scholasticism, which erects a model of reading that supercedes monastic *lectio divina*. Illich provides a succinct analysis contrasting monastic and scholastic versions of reading (51–92). In the monastic tradition, reading is a way of life and all reading is "an act of worship at whose center stands the incarnation of wisdom" (50). Scholasticism splits reading into two distinct practices, the prayerful *lectio spiritualis* and the scholarly *studium*, neither of which retains the status of monastic *lectio divina* as a pillar of pious living, and each of which becomes a specialized task defining the cleric as a professional. See Smalley for a nuanced account of the transformation of reading practices as the primacy of the monastery in literate culture yields to that of the university.

Fue alçado el moço pleno de bendición,
 salió de mancebía, ixió sancto varón;
 fazié Dios por él mucho, oyé su oración,
 fue saliendo afuera la luz del corazón.

Ponié sobre su cuerpo unas graves sentencias,
 ieunios e viglias e otras abstinencias;
 guardávase de yerros e de todas fallencias,
 non falsarié por nada las puestas convenencias. (40–41)

By becoming literate, Domingo has acquired a spiritual understanding and the desire, cultivated by a practice of meditative reading, proper to it. Light spills from his heart to illumine the terrain reconquered from the darkness of infidel rule as the body of the saint reiterates the texts that he has memorized, interpreted, and understood. Domingo now lives within his body as within a text inscribed with a language of holy witness that must not be falsely borne. Domingo's transition from childhood to manhood, then, is a process of reading, memory, and interpretation, filtered through the heart to emerge into the world as action. The saint's praxis—the translation of the sacred texts of memory into luminous action that emerges from the heart—takes place both at the intimate level of the corporeal devotion that writes virtue upon his body in 'sentencias' that he will not abjure and at the social level of ministry. His heart's light spills over the landscape—"fue toda la tierra por élli alumna" (45b)—as he shares the wisdom inscribed in his memory and instructs the folk of Cañas in the mnemonics of virtue. He himself functions as a book recalling piety to those living in the world and thus most vulnerable to the predations of oblivion: "Castigava los pueblos el padre ementado, / acordava las yentes, partiélas del peccado" (46ab).

Domingo's incorporation of the texts that inform his religious vocation is indeed a textualization of the person, a turning of the man into scripture. A symbolic system of embellishment utilizing precious metals and stones often makes visible the analogous function of books, shrines, and reliquaries.¹⁸ The likeness that assimilates these vessels of commemoration drives the language

18. For a discussion of the symbolic iconography and embellishment that assimilated shrines, reliquaries, and books, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 40–42. Dinshaw notes that the analogy linking written documents, relics, and the body, is especially salient in their fragmentary and partial mode of being (162–63).

of the verses in which the saint upbraids himself for delay in rejecting the world for a life of solitude. In a long soliloquy that voices his anguish over his comfortable life “en poblado” (64a), Domingo himself articulates a typological paradigm that inscribes a consecrated pattern upon his desire and makes explicit the connection between lived sanctity, a written record, and the unique agency of the commemorative object. The saint first considers his compatriots, San Millán and San Felices, before pondering the example of more distant forebears:

Muchos foron los padres que hicieron tal vida,
yace en Vitas Patrum d’ellos una partida;
toda gloria del mundo aviénla aborrida
por ganar en los Cielos alegría complida.

El Salvador del mundo, que por nos carne priso,
deque fo bateado, quando ayunar quiso,
por a nos dar exiemplo al desierto se miso,
ende salió el demon, mas fo ent mal repiso.

Los monges de Egipto, compannas benedictas,
por quebrantar sus carnes faciense heremitas;
tenién las voluntades en coraçon más fitas,
fueron de tales omnes muchas cartas escriptas.

Yo, peccador mesquino, en poblado, ¿que fago? (58–64a)

Domingo’s meditation positions Christ between Gregory’s *Lives of the Fathers* and the “muchas cartas escriptas” on the Egyptian saints, and his resolve follows firmly upon this last reference to the writing that the hermits generate. His readings of the “Vitas Patrum” and “cartas” mediate among his own private history, the history of the Church fathers, and salvation history. They allow Domingo to locate himself both diachronically and synchronically in a redeemed universe in which the hinge of meaning is Christ, the Word incarnate. As in the typology that imbued the unlettered shepherd’s life with scriptural significance, Berceo’s poetic word is the agent of typological linkage, binding Domingo to his Iberian predecessors as well as to the lives of the Fathers. Moreover, “yazer,” the word that describes a holy body lying in state, makes of Gregory’s written document a reliquary; the

body of precious knowledge that lies within the book's covers invites contrast with the living body that lies in comfort in Domingo's present priestly state.

The analogy of book, shrine, and reliquary finds expression throughout the narrative, and, importantly, Domingo himself is drawn into the sphere of likeness as a container of wisdom and power, an inscribed text. Berceo encrusts the figure of Santo Domingo de Silos with the same adornments—precious metals, pearls, jewels—that link tomb, reliquary, and text; this occurs, moreover, at precisely that point in his biography when Domingo's education is brought to completion:

Tal era como plata moço quatrogradero,
la plata torno oro quando fue pistolero;
el oro margarita en evangelistero,
quanto subió a preste semejó al lucero. (44)

The apotheosis of Santo Domingo as a privileged vessel of commemoration, a book of flesh, a living shrine, is achieved, and that vessel, as we have seen, pours a cascade of radiance upon the land.¹⁹ The luminous nimbus that attaches to Domingo, moreover, extends the analogy that links him to a book. In his comments on the *Didascalicon*, Ivan Illich notes that the figures in parchment illuminations

are luminous on their own [. . .] The world [on the illuminated parchment] is represented as if its beings all contained their own source of light. Light is immanent in the world of medieval things, and they reach the eye of the beholder as sources of luminosity. [T]he page radiates, but not only the page [. . .] the *lumen oculorum*, the light which emanates from the eye, was necessary to bring the luminous objects of the world into the

19. The luminosity that emanates from Domingo, then, represents the proper end of reading: according to Augustine and his twelfth-century follower Hugh of St. Victor, the internalized word is to find expression when “directed outwards as ethically informed action” (Stock, *Augustine* 12). Hugh's insistence on the ethical dimension of reading expressed in action is implicit in his scheme of the steps that raise the human life toward perfection: study, meditation, prayer, performance, and contemplation, which belongs only “to those who are perfect” (*Didascalicon* v:9, p. 132). Thus, performance, or ethical action that derives from reading, is the pinnacle that the majority of readers can hope to attain. See Allen (especially 4–38) and Dagenais (3–29) for discussions on the impact of the ethical imperative deriving from Augustinian doctrine upon medieval literary and literate culture.

onlooker's sense perception. The shining eye was a condition for sight. [R]eading removed the shadow and darkness from the eyes of a fallen race. Reading [. . .] is a remedy because it brings light back into a world from which sin banned it [. . .] Hugh presents the book as medicine for the eye. He implies that the book-page is a supreme remedy [. . .]. (19–21)

Domingo's radiance, like that of the parchment page, is a medicine for the world, dispelling the shadowy darkness of sin and healing the blindness, both spiritual and physical, of sinners held in the "ciega presón" (706b) of their condition.

Domingo's perfect reading engenders an ideal consubstantiality of text and man, like that of the virgin martyrs who reveal their stories to Oria. When the saint emerges from solitude to submit to monastic obedience, his embodiment of the foundational text of monasticism is so complete his person—that epitome of constancy and stasis—replaces the manuscript copy, which, as we know from Berceo's own grappling with remnants, is subject to the accidents of time and use. Just as the poem represented Domingo's apprehension of sacred scripture as an embodiment, his apprehension of the Rule of Benedict leads again to the metaphor of incarnation. Text is first manifest in action as the novice performs the precepts of his order: "Apriso bien la orden el novel cavallero, / andando en conviento ixió muy buen claustrero / [. . .] lo que dicié la regla facié él todavía, / guardava bien la orden sin ninguna follía. / [. . .] andava en la orden como bien ordenado [. . .]" (84–88). By the end of his novitiate, Domingo has become the object of the contemplation of his brother monks: "A él catavan todos como a un espejo / ca yacié grand tesoro so el su buen pellejo" (92ab). This suggests what will soon be made explicit: that Domingo embodies the text of the Benedictine Rule. The living saint metaphorically stands as both text and tomb. As an *espejo*, a mirror, Domingo is likened to the instructional genre of medieval Latin literature, the *Speculum*, which provides a perfect image of office for the aspirant to copy in his performance. The saint's readings have likened him to a glowing page; now each monk in turn comes before the light of wisdom emanating from that page so that he might recognize himself: "*ut seipsum agnoscat*."²⁰ The textual metaphor glides into a sepulchral metaphor in the next line. Figuring Domingo as "grand tesoro" lying "so buen pellejo,"

20. *Didascalicon* 1.1, cited in Illich, 17.

the poet both echoes the earlier description of the Gregorian text, *Vitae Patrum*, and announces the representation of the saint's interment yet to come: "metieron grand tesoro en muy grand angostura" (531c).²¹ What the poem has metaphorically suggested is made plain when Domingo returns from an exile devised by the abbot to test the new monk to stand as both the carnal analogue of the Rule and the living embodiment of Gregory's wisdom:

En logar de la regla todos a él catavan,
 en claustro e en coro por él se cabdellavan;
 los dichos que dicié melados semejavan,
 como los que de boca de Gregorio manavan. (121)

As a member of the monastery, that is, as a citizen of the earthly prefiguration of the city of God, Domingo represents the perfection of the duties of his citizenship in his perfect embodiment of its language. Moreover, as the Benedictine rule states explicitly—and as the identification of Domingo as a "novel cavallero" (84b) upon his entry into the monastery suggests—those duties include martial service in defense of the Regent:

So indeed, brothers, we have asked the Lord, who will dwell in his tabernacle [Psalm 14:1], we have heard His requirements for those living there, but we must fulfill the duties of those citizens. Therefore our hearts and our bodies are prepared to do battle in holy obedience to His commands. (*Regula Benedicti*, Prol. 39–40, 45; qtd. in Carruthers, *Craft* 106)

The Rule figures the knighthood required of the monk as one that is prepared and armed by the practices of language. Reading, understanding, and memory are the military exercises, oratory and pious writing the arms that defend the city within the claustral halls.²² Domingo's perfect incarnation of

21. The image of great treasure in a small container which in Berceo so powerfully assimilates the saint's life, the saint's death, and the saint's *Life* is parodically transformed in the *Libro de buen amor*, perhaps most saliently in the passage that applies the trope to the praise of small women (1606–17). The Archpriest's deployment of the antithesis, like Gonzalo's, assimilates body and book; however, the analogy he establishes links the erotic and the discursive.

22. As Carruthers notes, "[c]enobitic monasticism from the beginning thought of itself as a City – a city protected and sustained by its own kind of civic oratory, derived, in this case, from Scripture. It was a city in the desert [. . .] whose inhabitants were therefore citizens, not simply lone individuals" (*Craft* 106–7).

the Rule, then, would entail a perfect assumption of the martial obligations that pertain to it. The new knight's mastery of the exercises of his office will be tested in the defense of his city.

The embellishments that figure the person of Santo Domingo as reliquary, shrine, and book also pertain to the iconography of majesty and anticipate the crucial *agon* of the narrative when the saint defends the monastery against the rapacity of its patron. King García Sánchez arrives at San Millán to extract a loan from the monastic treasury. He argues that since his grandparents endowed the house, he is owed its riches: "cosa es derecha" (134c). In so doing, García Sánchez speaks and acts out of a failure of memory and a refusal of the commemorative function of both the monastery and the act of founding it. When Domingo, alone among the inhabitants of the cloister, defends the monastery and sternly warns García not to take for himself what his family has pledged to God, the enraged king threatens him with torture and ultimately death. The king specifically threatens the organs that emblemized Domingo's precocious virtue and, moreover, are engaged in reading: the eyes, which were cast down against worldly sights but are open to solemn lines of sacred writing, and the tongue, which was held still against "dichos corumpidos" (12d) but accompanies the eye in sounding out the silent page.²³ As Domingo makes clear in his final admonition to the king, the king's threats and his astounding repudiation of commemoration leave his own person vulnerable to a much more grave deprivation of sight: "En cadena te tiene el mortal enemigo / [. . .] de lo que ofrecist, non seas robador, / si non, veer non puedes la faz del Criador" (151c-154cd).

The blindness introduced in García's threat recurs throughout the miracle narratives of the second and third parts of the poem, first as the real wound many of Domingo's pilgrims suffer, then as the metaphorical expression of the privation of light and liberty that literal shackles enforce in the Moorish

23. Marina Brownlee's observations regarding the representation of the tongue as an emblem of reading and hermeneutic practices in late medieval texts offer an interesting perspective on this passage. Brownlee concludes her comparison of an Augustinian model of salvific reading with later models informed by nominalist skepticism by noting that the indestructible scroll of God's word that underwrote Augustine's paradigm of reading is "replaced by shreds of subjective fragments—dismembered texts and dismembered bodies" ("Ambivalent" 102), ushering in a new relationship of the corporeal and social ultimately leading to the construction of the modern subject. Domingo's heroic piety stands in the face of just such a threatened dismemberment of his own capacity to read according to a salvific model; it is his very somatization of that model and the texts filtered through it that enable his steadfastness before the King.

prisons from which Domingo miraculously delivers prayerful captives. Domingo's radiance, indeed, is a supreme remedy for the eye as for the soul, a medicine that García's blind rage would darken. Moreover, the imagery of chains that Domingo introduces here ultimately binds García to the final, unfinished miracle and informs the imaginary and collective closure of the scandalously open end.

Just as Domingo's unsullied memory signaled his spiritual prowess, throughout the remainder of the poem memory serves, in his encounters with those who seek his curative ministrations, as one of the primary indices of the soul's health. More importantly, Domingo's interventions write upon the healed bodies lessons for the remembrance of virtue. One sufferer whose demonic possession brings him before the saint "non avié nul acuerdo" (399c); forgetfulness drives another to repeat his sins after Domingo has saved him from an angry mob and admonished him to give up his thievery (423). Domingo bids goodbye to a woman whose illness he has healed with a lesson in corporeal mnemonics by voicing the analogy between memory and the embodiment of the commemorative text: "en quanto podieres guárdate de peccar, / deve est majamiento por siempre te membrar" (313cd). Here, in a more violent textualization of the body than Domingo underwent, the injury that the sinning woman has borne turns her body into an inscribed page upon which she can read both penance and virtuous action. Like the rapacious King whose failure of memory and denial of commemoration lead him to sin, the sinners and supplicants who appear before the saint bear with them memories that are flawed, like the ravaged manuscript with which Gonzalo himself struggles. Unlike García, they are apt pupils who submit to Domingo's corrective interventions and come away with mnemonic aids inscribed upon their bodies, their recollective faculties newly intact. The violent pedagogy becomes the corporeal technology that allows less-perfect readers to retain their lessons, as Domingo suggests when he leaves a recidivist sinner with a crippled body as a crutch to memory:

Más vale que enfermo a Paraíso vayas
que sano e valiant en el infierno cayas;
conviene que lo sufras maguer lacerio trayas,
ca de tornar qual eras esperança non ayas. (432)

This sinner's lameness, like the sinning woman's "majamiento," itself becomes a text, reminding him to forget sin and read virtue upon the broken page of his body.

As the narrator approaches the end of the miracle narratives, images of blindness and chains assimilate miraculous cures to miraculous deliverance of captives. Of a blind woman guided to the shrine for healing, the narrator states, “si yoguiesse en cárcel non yazrié mas cerrada” (622d); following her pilgrimage to Silos she “perdió la ceguedad por que presa andava” (625d). The subsequent miracle of healing concretizes the prison imagery, as a man enchained by his own family is delivered to the theater of marvelous intervention (627–35). These miracles, which conflate bodily suffering and sensory diminishment with imprisonment, lead to the penultimate miracle, wherein the captive knight Peidro prays for release from the cave in which he lies in irons:

E él misme rogava de firme corazón,
a Dios que lo tolliese de tan ciega presón,
ca si no li valiesse a poca de sazón
serié ciego o muerto o con grant lisión. (706)

Domingo appears as “lucencia grand e maravillosa / por medio de la cueva que era tenebrosa” (708ab), filling the stricture of the blind cave with his luminous medicine for the eye: the plenitude of his being, a plenitude perfected in his release from the prison of embodiment and ascension to the spiritual community of saints.

Peidro’s miraculous deliverance contextualizes the final, unfinishable marvel, which the narrator introduces specifically as a proof text for the verification of this penultimate miracle. Indeed, the narrator’s introduction of Domingo’s final feat—the miracle that will paradoxically lead to the failure of the text—emphasizes its role in regulating language and guaranteeing the truth of narratorial report. Specifically, the narration of the final miracle serves as a barrier to profligate speech:

Quequier que lo diga, o mugier o varón,
que el padrón de Silos non saca infanzón,
repiéndase del dicho ca non dize razón,
denuesta al confessor, predrá mal galardón.

Aún porque entienda que non dize derecho,
quiero juntar a ésti otro tal mismo fecho,
de otro cavallero que nunca dio nul pecho,
sacó’l sancto Domingo de logar muy estrecho. (731–32)

The unfinished miracle is offered as a proof text whose efficacy in controlling errant speech resonates—as does the whole of *La vida de Santo Domingo de Silos*, text and referent—in the here as in the hereafter. The narrator links the miracle to the proper veneration of the saint as an admonition against improper speech. Also, he connects the miracle and its regulatory effect upon language to eschatological destiny: the “mal galardón” promised to the unfaithful, in stark and cautionary contrast to the “galardón larguero” (4d)—in hopes of which the narrator offers the poem itself as his own remnant of suffering witness. That so much should hang on the “imperfect” miracle, the incomplete product of an imperfect text, is indeed striking. The story, however, is eminently perfectible through the narrator’s strategic telling. The tale collects and deploys all the thematic threads that have been woven into the story of Domingo’s life and works.

The last miracle tells of Juhan, a Christian citizen of Hita who, defying King Alfonso VI, leads a raid against the Moors of Guadalajara. The king, whose vassal city has been attacked and plundered, swears vengeance against the aggressors and imprisons Juhan and his unnamed cohorts in the dungeons of a Christian king for their strike against the Moorish town. In its portrayal of the Council of Hita—cowed and powerless before the rage of King Alfonso—this miracle narrative re-stages the scene played out in the monastery, when Domingo, alone among his timorous brethren, had stood up against the raging king. In this regard, the thematic thrust of the poem links Alfonso and García Sanchez as two worldly kings who yield to rage, who punish Christian ‘soldiers,’ and whose irate decrees transgress the memorial function of reconquered landscapes: the Guadalajaran frontier recaptured from Islamic control and the monastic city carved into the northern wilderness.

By leaving the final miracle incomplete, the narrator shifts the thematic focus of the story away from the wonders of the saint, who now intervenes from a realm outside human experience, and onto the secular world of kings and councils in which human experience unfolds and in which texts fall prey to the corruptions of time and use. The poem, however, has provided a key to reading from within this world, a guide to proper interpretation. Domingo’s *Vida* has conveyed sufficient knowledge of the saint and his meanings so that the collective audience is empowered to “finish” the story, to bring the resplendence of the page Domingo has embodied to the dank cell in which Juhan is left praying. “Escribir a ventura serié muy grant folía” (751d); thus, the narrator who works from a flawed page—sure enough of his powers

that he trusts the force of his utterance to inscribe itself upon the hearts of its hearers—leaves the perfection of the final tale to the silent, meditative, and wholly internal writing of his audience. The guarantee that their writing will be neither hazarded nor hazardous lies in the faithful reading that Domingo himself has embodied and whose constant example his readers are now called upon, within the reading of the poem itself, to imitate. The open text of the saint's life closes in the collective memory of the audience, which envisions Juhan's deliverance from the blind prison of Alfonso's wrath, thus closing the captive's tale and, in remembering him, saving him from the narrative oblivion that would signal the failure to win a place in God's memory.²⁴

Writers of the Middle Ages were all too aware of the fragmentary nature of human language and recognized that a viable "strategy of using language in a postlapsarian world, cut off from primary wholeness and unity" proceeds according to a "hermeneutics of the partial" (Dinshaw 158–59) that acknowledges the incompleteness of meaning. Paul Saenger's study of the evolution of word separation in writing suggests that the silent and private reading that had become widespread by the thirteenth century severely compromised the possibility of a unified, totalizing meaning and had "direct and unsettling effects on Christian doctrine" (256). Brownlee reads the *Libro de Buen Amor* as a skeptical disarticulation of Augustine's notion of the redemptive power of reading and suggests that for the fourteenth-century poet Juan Ruiz, memory is itself a flawed remnant analogous to the "shreds of subjective fragments" that constitute human texts and human readings ("Ambivalent" 101).

While Gonzalo de Berceo wrests the *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* out of the remnants of a failed text, in so doing he offers in the person of the saint a hermeneutic that transcends both the partial and the private. Domingo's sanctity emerges as the formation of a soul inscribed by holy language. Meditative *lectio* proceeds through memory and intellect to undergo a corporeal hermeneusis, transformed as desire into luminous action. Domingo embodies virtuous memory, and reading and memory become an askesis, a bodily discipline that informs his will and his action. His ascetic practice of

24. Patricia Grieve's "Spectacle of Memory/Mary" analyzes the theme of memory and its role in determining the narrative structure of Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, concluding that memory itself constitutes "a kind of inner writing," and that this conception of memory is very much at stake in Berceo's poetic practice.

reading, like traditional martyrdom, transforms his body into a vehicle and a voice of devotion. Domingo's example offers a hermeneutic that restores plenitude of being and meaning to the shreds and shards that we, with Berceo, must decipher. The poem compels its readers to commemorate the saint in the act of reading and likewise seeks a place in the saint's memory—a remembrance that would draw his narrator and readers into the heaven where Domingo now resides; a remembrance that is a forethought of salvation (775–76).

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